Editorial

CBS Comedy Hour(s)

From the Weekly Packet, Blue Hill, Maine, Grassroots Editor

People who eagerly awaited the findings of the Warren Commission to learn the true story surrounding the assassination of President John F. Kennedy were disappointed with the shoddy performance of the Commission. Its report raised more questions than it answered. Its conclusions, however, came as a surprise to no one: the Commission, setting out to prove that Kennedy was shot by Lee Harvey Oswald, alone and unassisted, concluded just that. What was surprising was that the vast body of evidence collected by the Commission, much of it irrelevant, tended to indicate exactly the opposite of the Commission's conclusions.

As incomplete as it was, despite its massiveness, the Commission-collected evidence simply did not justify its conclusions. The Commission, itself, opened the door to the storm of criticism that followed publication of the report and proceedings. In short the Commission did such a bad job that hardly any other reaction could have been expected.

The Columbia Broadcasting System—all news media, in fact—had a wonderful opportunity to fill the gaps of the Warren report, chase down the loose ends, answer the unanswered questions and provide a meaningful public service through independent investigation and analysis. CBS undertook to do this.

When CBS announced its four one-hour documentaries examining the Warren Commission report there should have been no doubt as to what CBS would conclude. Any critical viewer of CBS realizes that the word "objective" is not in the CBS vocabulary. Without wasting time watching any of the four documentaries, one could safely conclude that CBS would conclude the Warren Commission was right. The government, particularly the administration, in the view of CBS can do no wrong.

The fact is CBS, given a golden opportunity to be of real public service, muffed its chance. After viewing the first three shows we conclude its conclusions are even harder to believe than the Warren Commission's.

Certainly CBS provided a few new insights, and a couple of their analyses could be called almost brilliant. But these were interspersed with gaps, gaps, gaps, and complete omission of any consideration whatsoever of some of the most important discrepancies.

CBS is to be commended for doing what the Warren Commission failed to do: simulating the conditions under

which Oswald is supposed to have fired the fatal shots. The CBS test is much more believable than the Warren Commission's—CBS used a moving target. Still, Oswald would have had to be a better shot than CBS's 11 experts.

CBS did an excellent job in timing the shots by analysis of the Zapruder movie of the film, using camera jar as a basis. It was an excellent beginning. Yet, like the Warren Commission, much of it was negative evidence: we can agree with CBS that the three shots where the Zapruder film is blurred indicate Zapruder jumped at those points, probably startled by the gunfire. We cannot agree with CBS, however, that this proves only three shots were fired, for there is no proof Zapruder always jumps when a gun is fired, and even if he did if two guns were fired simultaneously from different locations. Zapruder would only have jumped once. Nor did CBS carry this investigation further to cover the two other known movies of the assassination. Like the Warren Commission, it failed to examine all the evidence.

It made another mistake similar to the Warren Commission—it asked verification from an expert whose own evidence was under attack. (Who did the Warren Commission ask to check out reports Oswald was an undercover FBI and CIA agent? Why the FBI and CIA, of course.) CBS's analysis of the "single bullet" theory was based to a large extent on one expert who said it was possible, but extremely improbable that the one unmutilated bullet could have passed through both President Kennedy and Governor Connally. Despite this CBS concluded the bullet had done just that.

To prove the validity of the report of the autopsy of the President, CBS asked the man who conducted the original autopsy, a man completely unqualified to have conducted the autopsy in the first place. CBS implied he was an expert, having conducted over a thousand autopsies. What CBS did not tell its viewers was that the doctor, an expert in disease, has had practically no experience in forensic medicine, forensic autopsies, or bullet wounds. Practically all of his autopsies were to verify diagnosis. Based on the comments of the man who conducted the autopsy, CBS concluded the autopsy report was correct. CBS did not consider the bullet wounds in relation to the holes in the President's clothing—which